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ABSTRACT

Tasks have become an essential feature of second language (L2) learning in recent years. Tasks range from getting learners to repeat linguistic elements satisfactorily to having them perform in "free" production. Along this task-based continuum, task-based scenario interaction lies at the point midway between controlled and semi-controlled extremes. This paper provides examples of how linguistic and pragmatic elements can be developed in natural discourse using a task-based system in the context of scenarios. The paper focuses on language for specific purposes (English for Tourism courses at the tertiary level), it is suggested that these methods can also be used in second language education. In second language learning, the quality and quantity of the learners' exposure to the target language is not nearly as intense as it was for first language acquisition. Planned and unplanned role-playing are explored as pedagogic tools, as well as how space for these devices can be created in the L2 classroom by inducing spontaneity and the use of tutorials. Data from the study is appended. (Contains 16 references.) (KFT)

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PROMOTING DISCOURSE WITH TASK-BASED SCENARIO INTERACTION

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Over the last few years tasks have become essential in the foreign language learning process (Nunan 1991). However, there are many kinds of tasks, with various pedagogical objectives (Seedhouse 1999). In a continuum these may be seen as ranging from getting learners to repeat linguistic elements satisfactorily to having students perform in "free" production. Along this pedagogical continuum, task-based scenario interaction lies at a point that is halfway between the controlled and semi-controlled extremes (Kao and O'Neill 1998).

In this paper I will give examples of how linguistic and pragmatic elements can be developed in natural discourse using a task-based system in the context of scenarios (Di Pietro 1994). Though I will focus on Language for Specific Purposes (English for Tourism) courses at the tertiary level, I suggest that the system can also be used in both ESL and EFL settings.

When learning a second language (L2), the quantity and quality of a student's exposure to the target language is generally not as intensely thorough as it was during the first language (L1) acquisition process. L1 and L2 skills development both depend on contextualized input; however, while contextualized input is natural in the L1 acquisition experience, it is limited, if not utterly lacking, in the L2 learning process. As a result, communicative language skills development is curtailed. Having had little opportunity to experience natural, spontaneous communication in the classroom setting, students are often unprepared to recognize the implicit meanings of contextualization cues in natural discourse. They tend to engage in what Widdowson (1985: 85) refers to as "conventional discourse," ignoring the "communicative potential of the language."

Pursuing the issue of language skills transferability from the formal learning situation to more natural contexts , Krashen (1981) developed his theory of the polarity of acquisition and learning, in which acquiring a L2 is thought to depend on a natural as opposed to a strictly classroom determined process. Marton's (1994: 57) reservations with regard to what he calls the "anti-pedagogical implications" of Krashen's theory notwithstanding, I believe that most endeavours aimed at creating a more natural environment within the classroom context are pedagogically necessary. Learners are more likely to experience the signalling value of natural, spontaneous communication when conditions allow for "highly contextualized exposure to language" (Jiang 2000: 49).

In a broad sense, natural contextualized input is coterminous with 'real' communication. For much of actual communication involves attempts by interlocutors to understand one another in a cooperative, dialogic process.

The trouble with the process of learning (in Krashen's use of the term) another language is that the classroom setting tends to decontextualise language. Linguistic and verbal act meaning are commonly linked exclusively to superficial planes, such as speaker intention, strategic discourse types, or language management for reasons of persuasion and information sharing. In the classroom situation, scarce attention is likely to be given to what Bialystok (1994: 10), echoing Brown et al. (1983), refers to as the "qualitative difference between strategic and nonstrategic solutions to problems" in communication. More often than not, classroom time is primarily spent on the subjects of grammar, syntax, vocabulary,

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and pronunciation, as well as on the identification and teaching of strategic approaches to learning and communicating.

The problem with a classroom pedagogical approach that focuses mainly on the linguistic aspects of the L2, and on strategies for communicative problem-solving, is that it more often than not ignores automatic performance opportunities. Classroom pedagogy tends to focus more on planning language production than it does on productive language execution. Faerch and Kasper (1983) distinguish between the two, positing, as Bialystok (1994: 20) points out "that strategies are relevant only to the planning phase." In the productive execution phase, however, strategies involving active planning and academic learning, are influenced by unplanned affective or emotional aspects. It is in this phase in particular that language learners acquire what Stern (1984: 411) refers to as "an affective strategy." He observes that "classroom learning as well as immersion in the target language environment each entail specific affective problems which have been characterized as language shock and stress, and as culture shock and stress" (411-412). This paper proposes that a pedagogical space needs to be created in which learners are given the opportunity to come to grips with coping, in Stern's words, "effectively with the emotional and motivational problems of language learning" (411).

Providing learners with a setting such as this, within the constraints of the classroom environment, entails invoking contextual conditions in which the language can become, to some extent at least, "a reality for the learners" (Widdowson 2000: 7). In pursuit of this—if seemingly elusive—context within the limits established by the institutionalised classroom environment, I make use of the tutorial setting. In this sense, the tutorial can be seen as a pedagogical space that is neither a classroom context nor a thoroughly 'natural' setting. It is the most suitable pedagogical space that I have found to explore the possibilities of role-playing activities that generate discoursal practice that makes allowances for the many opaque gaps naturally existing between what is clearly said and what is positively understood by students. Relegating matters pertaining to pragmatics, factual meaning and involvement strategies to the classroom learning process, during the tutorial period I help students to experience the language affectively through role-plays, in a space in which they can dialogically (Bakhtin [1934] 1981) experience in a more spontaneous manner, implicit meanings and suggestive interstices, the significance of which their minds determine from contextualization clues that hinge on the signalling value of natural, spontaneous communication.

In observing students' role-play performance during the tutorial, I consider their role-playing from two perspectives: While I evaluate their performance in the rehearsed part of the role-play, I merely monitor the part that corresponds to the improvised performance. Following is an example of how this is done with English Tourism I students at the University of Valencia School of Tourism.

In order to facilitate dialogue, a topic is first introduced in the context of an interview in which one student is the interviewer and the other the interviewee. The students are encouraged to incorporate into their performance the pragmatic, grammatical and phonological items they had learned in the course. The performance venue is the space allotted for tutorials.

First, the students interactively prepare to perform their interview for the instructor. Once they have performed their rehearsed scene, they are required to remain in character while they answer a question the instructor puts to them. The question is designed to provoke an unrehearsed dialogue between the interlocutors. This gives them the

opportunity to experience authentic, unpredictable dialogic exchanges based on the simulated exercise they prepared.

Following is an example. Two students, both nineteen years of age, were asked to prepare a dialogue in which one of them is interviewed for a job. In the role of the interviewee, Pilar introduced herself to the interviewer, Maria Angeles, who then explained briefly what the job entailed and why she had called Pilar in for an interview. As had been rehearsed beforehand, the interviewer proceeded to ask a battery of questions, to which the interviewee promptly and adequately replied. As is normally the case with the sort of task assignments in ESP that require students to prepare a role-play, the resulting dialogue exchange sounded more like a question and answer recitation from a phrasebook text than it did an interview. It could be said that the task they performed was successful as pedagogically induced discourse. From this perspective, Pilar would have received a better grade than María Angles, who was hesitant and struggled with vocabulary, grammar, syntax and pragmatics more than her interlocutor did. Pilar seemed to have had more experience with the language, perhaps having travelled abroad to an English speaking country for an extended period of time; or she may have had more talent, or as Graham Greene (1967: 174) once put it, "the gift of expression."

As I have already mentioned, the task assignment was pedagogically successful in that the performers had complied with what was required of them as Tourism I students. But there was one serious glitch towards the end of the performance. Pilar and María had not planned a proper closing for their role-play interview. As a result, when the battery of questions had been asked, and the prepared answers given, and the performers had come to a point that they had not rehearsed, they were faced with the risky prospect of having to improvise an ending. They could not abandon or avoid the topic of bringing the interview to a satisfactory close. They somehow had to find a way to confront the problem by spontaneously "developing an alternative plan" (Bialytok 1994: 31). At first, there was a long, uncomfortable silence as they emotionally experienced the impact of their dilemma, which Pilar, the more linguistically adept of the two, interrupted at last in a strategically affective manner, with the intention of saving what otherwise had been a fairly good performance.

Besides the obvious linguistically related problems that appeared both in the rehearsed and unrehearsed dialogue, what was noteworthy about the improvised part of the dialogue was the manifest attempt by the interlocutors to immediately understand each other and engage in a cooperative, dialogic process. Once removed from the external plane of linking verbal act meaning, and from matters related to pragmatic and discourse style and communication strategies based on negotiation management of language for reasons of persuasion (which, the rehearsed dialogue had primarily focused on), information sharing between them became more authentic during the improvised dialogue. This can be seen immediately after the long uncomfortable pause marking the end of the rehearsed dialogue and the realization that they had neglected to prepare a proper ending. Starting with the laughter that the two students shared at the beginning of the improvisation, communication between them was transformed into an intimate and spontaneous experience of human contact.

Looking at the transcription of the improvised dialogue (See the data appendix.), one immediately notes the performers' awkwardness. There is a sudden reversal of roles and an emotional release that is expressed in laughter. Whereas in the rehearsed dialogue Pilar was the interviewee, in the improvisation or scenario she suddenly takes the initiative, becoming

the interviewer in the improvisation. This is understandable, since earlier she demonstrated she was better able to handle the language. Pragmatically, it was Mª Angeles' responsibility as the interviewer to bring the conversation to a close. But she seemed unable to do so. Pilar, therefore, intervenes in a pragmatically viable way, inserting metatext in the form of a question which, given her role as a candidate for the job, would certainly be plausible since it concerns the salary she can expect to receive if she is given the position (Line 3). It takes Mª Angeles a few moments to respond—for the students did not previously work out the details of the answer to this particular question—and at one point, in exasperation, Mª Angeles can only make an exclamation in Spanish (end of Line 4). Pilar suggests a suitable language item in English (Line 5), which Pilar rapidly echoes in confirmation (Line 6), and Pilar reinforces with an exclamation of approval (Line 7).

Pilar continues to reinforce MªAngles (Line 9), who struggles to regain the upper hand as the interviewer (Lines 8 and 10). Pilar centers the conversation on the question of how much the salary might be, (Line 10), an improvised verbal action Mª Angles would reasonably be expected to handle with some measure of ease. However, seeing her colleague still struggling (Lines 12, 14, 16, 18, 20), Pilar makes further attempts to save the situation (Lines 13, 15, 17, 19), though she herself shows signs of having difficulty articulating her thoughts in English: E.g., in Lines 13 and 15, Spanish interference causes her to say "offerts" instead of 'offers," the Spanish equivalent of which is 'ofertas.' After a somewhat prolonged emotional expression of relief (exchanges of laughter in lines 20, 24, and 25), Mª Angeles in her role as interviewer, explains with some difficulty that the working conditions are irregular (Line 26). Once again, Pilar tries to help her make her point (Line 27) in a way that is pragmatically acceptable: I.e., she concisely summarizes what her interlocutor has said in order to communicate that she has understood. Reaffirmed in her role as interviewer, Mª Angeles takes the initiative to bring the conversation to a close (Lines 28 and 30). Pilar assists her in the endeavour (Line 33), but Mª Angeles is slow to pick up the cue to bring the conversation to a close: Mª Angeles responds to Pilar's gesture with a curt reply (Line 34), which given the circumstances would normally be considered a faulty discourse sequence. The interviewee responds in kind, and seems to be waiting for the next move, the initiation of which corresponds to Mª Angeles, who as the interviewer must formally bring the interview to a close. But once again, Mª Angeles becomes awkward (Line 36), unable to comply with what is pragmatically expected of her as the interviewer. As Pilar has done on several occasions during the improvisation, she tenders a helpful phrase (Line 37) to her interlocutor, who awkwardly delays putting into effect the proper termination of the move until Line 41.

The conversational data from the improvised dialogue shows the learners engaging in authentic, unrehearsed language performance. Of the two interlocutors, Pilar exhibits more linguistic competence. But as the data reveals, her interlocutor's less developed grammatical and lexical competence are not the primary causes of delays in the discoursal process. Faulty language use, for example, does not keep Pilar from understanding Mª Angeles' lengthy statements in Line 28 and Line 29. The flow of conversation is only impaired when a pragmatic break down occurs.

The deviant sequences resulting from Mª Angeles' weaker discourse competence forced Pilar to make spontaneous adjustments. This is consistent with the natural speech of, say, a Spanish tour operator, which Pilar as a Tourism major may possibly become in the future. That is to say, in her professional field she will likely deal with people whose discourse competence in English is unreliable. She will, therefore, need authentic experience in

working through situations in which ill-formed speech acts rather than faulty grammar and vocabulary hinder communication.

Input being perhaps the most significant, if complex, concept in second language acquisition, discourse competence needs to be developed under both controlled and less controlled conditions. Of the two, the former condition, though less meaningful in terms of authentic discourse experience, is more frequently used in the classroom setting. One way of getting learners to experience more meaningful L2 input and output is to provide them with tasks that serve as "springboards to (inter)action" (Lynch and Anderson 1992, 3). Allowing students the opportunity to work through odd sequences, in which deviances across speakers' utterances are effected in an unplanned manner, helps them to experience what it means to contextualize 'real' language. Communicative tasks such as role-plays and interactive problem solving activities, case studies and drama are all particularly useful performance activities for achieving this.

However, not all rehearsed role-plays will automatically become improvised. In those cases in which a planned role-play is successfully brought to a close, the instructor may need to intervene. More often than not, a simple question will be enough to provoke a spontaneous dialogue in a scenario between the participants. For example, in a job interview role-play between two other students, the interviewee had supposedly written in her curriculum vitae that she had graduated from the University of Valencia School of Tourism. This being impossible, for the three-year program had only been operating for two years, I intervened after they had finished their rehearsed dialogue. I asked her when she expected to graduate. When she replied, "next year," I brought the inconsistency to her attention, and asked the interviewer if she would hire a person who had lied in her curriculum vitae. I then pressed them to role-play the ensuing, unplanned dialogue in a scenario. In another example, a student playing the role of a tourist agent helped a would be traveller book a package tour to Cuba for a week at the unbelievably low price of 150 dollars. When the fairly well-executed rehearsed dialogue came to an end, I asked the student role-playing the tourist agent if she had any idea how much 150 dollars was worth in pesetas. Then I had them perform an improvised scenario in which the tourist agent had to explain why the package tour was in fact so cheap.

As this paper has shown, a role-play may be broken into two parts: planned (rehearsed) and unplanned (spontaneous). In order to involve students in spontaneous discourse, the conditions for a scenario must be put in place, whereby students can participate in a more authentic dialogic process with the framework of the constraints imposed upon them by situation and character. In order to induce spontaneity in the classroom context, a space must be created for that purpose. In this paper, I have suggested that the tutorial can serve this purpose.

Data Appendix

1. Pilar: i would like to (laugh) make a question [
2. Mª Angles: (laugh) [
3. Pilar: what about the (laugh) the salary (laugh) because i don't know anything about that
4. Mª Angeles: i said then – i said later – that – eh – we paid – eh – only the hard work and – eh – you – i – i – don't know – eh – how – eh – where – eh – are you going to work – are you going – you are go – (exclamation in Spanish 'a ver') [
5. Pilar: are you going [
6. Mª Angeles: are you going to work [
7. Pilar: (uh huh) [
8. Mª Angeles: eh – when you – eh – you are – eh – if you are – are chose – chose – chosen [
9. Pilar: (uh huh) [
10. Mª Angeles: eh – you – eh – have to – eh – work here – eh – for – eh – three – three months – and – eh – eh – in this – eh – in this in – eh – in this – this - during this – this tree months – eh – we are going to – to – to check it – to check – check you – and – eh – eh – we can – eh – see together – eh – what – eh – what salary – eh – to – to – do you have to earn [
11. Pilar: but could you tell me an amount more or less [
12. Mª Angeles: eh – (pause) [
13. Pilar: because i have to know because i have a – a thousands of – offerts (laugh) [
14. Mª Angeles: (laugh) [
15. Pilar: of the offerts – (laugh) [
16. Mª Angeles: (laugh) – yes [
17. Pilar: ( ) [
18. Mª Angeles: (laugh) [
19. Pilar: in pesetas or dollars [
20. Mª Angeles: (laugh) [
21. Pilar: pesetas – it's okay [

22. Mª Angeles: (laugh) – eh – one hundred and – one hundred – uh – and fifty dollars – uh [

23. Pilar: okay – that's okay – more or less [

24. Mª Angeles: (laughs) – more or less – (laughs) [

25. Pilar: (laughs) [

26. Mª Angeles: it depends on the work – eh – eh – in this – eh – in this job – eh – you can work – eh – eh – one week – eh – you can work very hard – and another week – eh – you don't have to – to work – eh – more than – a few hours [

27. Pilar: uh huh – it depends on – the situation [

28. Mª Angeles: uh huh – we have – uh – [resaved]– uh – [resaved] – uh – more ( ) – of more – eh – of more people – and – eh – i – would like to – check them – and – eh – later – eh – uhm – uhm – we're going with all of the department – eh – eh – exec – the marketing executive – eh – the check the curriculums and the – eh [

29. Pilar: ( ) [

30. Mª Angeles: we will – er – [hanswer] – eh – the – the – the – ( ) – and – eh – we can make – eh – a – practicing – a training – of your – of your job – and – eh – (pause) – and – then we can – eh – we can make – a – [

31. Pilar: uh huh [

32. Mª Angeles: agreement an agreement – eh – with all the company [

33. Pilar: uh huh – so – and then that's all for now [

34. Mª Angeles: yes [

35. Pilar: okay [

36. Mª Angeles: eh [

37. Pilar: so you have my telephone number and – uh – you ( ) [

38. Mª Angeles: okay – i have your [

39. Pilar: ( ) [

40. Mª Angeles: curriculum and all you – your ( ) [

41. Pilar: (laughs) [

42. Mª Angeles: i phone you if i – if you are chose [

43. Pilar: okay thank you

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